

PUBLIC

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Further Information on UA 246/06 (MDE 13/101/2006, 12 September 2006) – Fear for safety/Unfair trial/possible prisoner of conscience

IRAN **Reza Abbasi (m), human rights defender**

Human rights defender Reza Abbasi was sentenced to one year's imprisonment in mid-October: six months for "insulting the Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran" and another six months for "propaganda against the system". He has been held in Zenjan Central Prison since his arrest in June, and has spent at least two months in solitary confinement. The Zenjan office of the Ministry of Intelligence has reportedly been harassing Reza Abbasi's family: this has included repeatedly summoning his elderly parents for interrogation and ordering them not to tell anyone about their son's situation.

Amnesty International believes Reza Abbasi is a prisoner of conscience, held solely on account of his peaceful activities on behalf of the Iranian Azerbaijani community in Iran.

Reza Abbasi is a founder member of an organization which has been active in promoting democracy and human rights, ASMEK (Committee for the Defence of Azerbaijani Political Prisoners) and of the Alumni Association of Iran (*Sazman-e Danesh Amukhtegan-e Iran-e Eslami (Advar-e Tahkim-e Vahdat)*). On 17 December 2005, Reza Abbasi made a speech at Zenjan University in which he strongly criticized the Iranian authorities. ASMEK was founded in around 2002, and has come under pressure from the authorities. Four of its founding members, including Reza Abbasi, are said to have been detained in April 2004.

Reza Abbasi was arrested on 27 June 2006, after he failed to comply with a telephoned order to attend an Intelligence Ministry facility for interrogation. On 12 May the state-owned daily newspaper *Iran* had published a cartoon which many in the Iranian Azerbaijani community found offensive, and this had led to widespread demonstrations, and Reza Abbasi's arrest may have been linked to these. It may also have been connected with the annual Babek Castle gathering, which was to take place on 30 June. Thousands of Iranian Azerbaijanis gather every year to celebrate the birthday of Babek Khorramdin, who lived in the ninth century and is regarded as a hero by Iranian Azerbaijanis. The authorities have often tried to suppress these gatherings, and this year the security forces were reported to have arrested a number of people before it took place, possibly to prevent certain activists from attending.

Reza Abbasi is known to have appeared in court on two occasions: on 5 September, he was reportedly brought before Branch One of the Revolutionary Court in Zenjan, in a closed session without his lawyer or his family present. A second closed session was held on 11 September, this time with his lawyer present, who afterwards reportedly stated that Reza Abbasi had been questioned about his activities in various student organizations and for ASMEK.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Persian, Arabic, English or your own language:

- expressing concern that Reza Abbasi has been sentenced to a year's imprisonment for "insulting the Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran" and "propaganda against the system", apparently because of his peaceful exercise of his internationally recognized right to freedom of expression and association through his work as a human rights defender;
- stating that you believe Reza Abbasi to be a prisoner of conscience, and urging the authorities to release him immediately and unconditionally;

- expressing concern that Reza Abbasi's trial, in a closed session before a Revolutionary Court in Zenjan, does not appear to have met international standards for fair trial;
- calling on the authorities to allow him regular access to his family and his lawyer, and to any medical treatment he may require;
- expressing concern for his family, some of whom have reportedly been harassed and intimidated by the authorities.

APPEALS TO:

Leader of the Islamic Republic

His Excellency Ayatollah Sayed Ali Khamenei

The Office of the Supreme Leader, Shoahada Street, Qom, Islamic Republic of Iran

Fax: + 98 251 774 2228 (mark "FAO the office of His Excellency, Ayatollah al Udhma Khamenei")

Email: info@leader.ir
istiftaa@wilayah.org

Salutation: Your Excellency

Ministry of Intelligence

Gholam Hossein Mohseni Ejeie

Ministry of Intelligence, Second Negarestan Street

Pasdaran Avenue, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Email: iranprobe@iranprobe.com

Salutation: Your Excellency

COPIES TO:

President

His Excellency Mahmoud Ahmadinejad

The Presidency, Palestine Avenue, Azerbaijan Intersection, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Email: dr-ahmadinejad@president.ir
via website: www.president.ir/email

and to diplomatic representatives of Iran accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 12 January 2007.